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ABSTRACT

A discussion of rural education in India presents an overview of the subcontinent's geography, history, philosophy, economy, rural environment, and population and relates these factors to problems and changes in rural educational practices and conditions. The paper points out increases in school and college enrollment, education of more females, resistance to educational innovation, beginnings of an emphasis on teaching of manual skills and technical subjects, and the need for rigorous overhauling of the educational system necessary to meet needs of industrialization. Problems facing rural education are emphasized, including lack of educational relevance to everyday life, distance to schools, lack of vocational education, and a "brain drain" resulting from educational emphasis on producing intellectuals rather than intelligent technicians, businessmen, scientists, and political leaders. Efforts to industrialize in order to keep pace with urbanization and other models of modernization and political implications for future development are discussed. (LFL)

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RURAL EDUCATION IN INDIA:
Unity Through Diversity

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RURAL EDUCATION IN INDIA

"Unity Through Diversity"

Any discussion of rural education in India without the reader's clear understanding of the geography, history and philosophy of the subcontinent is probably meaningless. Therefore, a general introduction is included to insure a commonality of reader comprehension.

General Introduction to India and the Indian Culture

"My notion of democracy is that under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest"
(Mahandas K. Gandhi)

India as a nation of the modern world is still emerging from its infancy, having been born to democratic soverignity as recently as 1947. This modern fledgling nation actually represents a culture whose foundations were laid long before Athens or Rome were born and centuries before Europe emerged from tribalism. No other culture having such antiquity, except possibly the Chinese, has remained a living culture. The Egyptian, Hittite, Babylonian and Minoan civilizations are somewhat older but today they remain only as topics for archaeologists. Very few nations of the world hold the cultural, linguistic, ethnic, philosophical and geographical diversity of India. Nearly 4,000 years ago invaders from the Steepes of Central Asia began spreading over the Asian subcontinent.

It was these nomadic intruders who founded the Indian Civilization. It is ironic that one of the oldest continuous civilizations still existing on earth today was founded by the migrating Aryan peoples. It is equally ironic that modern India is often referred to as a backward developing nation, considering the fact that it nutures an ancient heritage that developed the decimal system, Arabic numerals, the Taj Mahal and Budhism, one of the world's

great religions.

Indian Philosophy

> "I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt whether what you are going to do is right or wrong bring to your mind the picture of the most wretched suffering downtrodden human being whom you have ever seen and ask yourself the question whether what you are going to do now will help him in any way. If you do this you will find that your doubts will vanish in a moment" (Mohandas K. Gandhi).

When the world thinks of Indian philosophy the image of Gurus, Swamis and Oriental Mystics engaged in yoga instantly emerges. In India, no clear cut distinction between philosophy and religion has ever been made. According to the legend of St. Thomas, (52 A.D.), Christianity is even older in India than in Europe. Zorastrianism was brought to India by the Aryan invaders from the Asian Steepes and is, therefore, quite ancient. The advent of Islam to India was through a series of successive waves of military attacks and invasions beginning with Muhammod B. Qasim in 712 A.D.

For over eighty percent of India's population, Hinduism is their religion, philosophy and way of life. Hinduism is an extremely complex mixture of philosophy and religion with members worshiping a baffling variety of gods and near-gods. God is Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver and Siva, the Destroyer of Evil. Hinduism is based on the Vedas which are holy scriptures revealed to, but not composed by, the authors. Additionally the Smiti's and Puranas, are considered to be of great importance even though they were authored by humans and not divinely inspired. The Law of Karma is very important from the point of view of its effect on the educational philosophy of India--especially rural India. According to Rege, "Modern Western thought is dominated by the dichotomy between mind and matter. Indian thought is dominated by the dichotomy between the true, the real, the pure self and the world. The Self is essentially unconnected

with the world though it identifies itself through ignorance with a body-mind complex through which it appears to be connected with the world. But when this ignorance is dispelled it regains its true nature or rather the knowledge of its true nature . . . . This is a conception accepted by nearly all Indian philosophical schools."[1] As Plato has said, all philosophy begins in wonder and any student of Indian philosophy may believe it is impossible for the Western mind to fully understand and will ultimately resign themselves to a state of incomprehension and wonderment. Some Western philosophers have reached the somewhat incorrect conclusion that Indian philosophy is individualistic when actually it is quite social in character. Perhaps one of the Mantras or holy scriptures can be used to clarify the individualistic and the social character: "We will protect together, we will live together, we shall show our lustre together.... Let all be happy, let all be healthy, let all look fresh and let none be miserable."[2] How does this philosophy affect the education of the people and how can it be used to truly achieve "Unity from such Diversity"? The answer is very difficult. The question still lies hanging in the balance and yet awaits a final answer and accounting. One of the main concepts of Hinduism is the acceptance and tolerance of all philosophies and religions. This philosophy pervades daily life so completely as to be one of the major characteristics of Indian society. In India, one often encounters a very matter-of-fact attitude revealing a personal and national resilience in the face of change and adversity. Sir Percival Speas once referred to this often cited resiliency "of the Indian peasantry as an elaborate survival mechanism of encapsulation."[3] Regardless of how one attempts to describe the Indian peasants' acceptance of misfortune as being a natural phenomenon in the ebb and flow of life is still a foreign attitude to the Western mind. How can they accept hardship, hunger, poverty, disease and illiteracy uncomplainingly, as though nothing is wrong

and life is entirely copacetic? The Indian attitude is quite simply Naya Kya Hai or so what else is new?"[4] In any event, the Hindu religion, or way of life, has given mankind one of the most sophisticated philosophical systems ever devised.

The Physical Environment

"In India everything is true--somewhere"
(Old Indian Adage)

"From purple mountains majesty" could be used to describe the northern Indian border region and its 28,000' Himalayan peaks and the remote ancient kingdom of Sikkim. The United States is two and one half times the size of India but India's population is over three times as great. Steaming rain-forests populated with some of the world's rarest and most exotic flora and fauna, a desert, beautiful tropical coastal plains, a high, dry plateau, one of the world's most productive alluvial plains and great river valleys: such is physical India. A geography of a country bespeaks many of the causes of the country's problems. According to Professor Wagh of the University of Poona, "Some of the significant geographical facts regarding India is its vast size: a (3.3 million KM^2) triangular shape, a tropical and subtropical location, a long coast line (5,685 KM.), a central position in the eastern hemisphere and a variety of resources--natural and human."[5] It is the author's perspective that Wagh is correct in concluding that "India's climate, agricultural land-use, nature of industrial development and foreign trade, the linguistic, educational and food problems, etc., can be explained, partly or wholly, on the basis of these geographical factors."[6]

In 20 A.D. Strabo warned "We must hear accounts of India with indulgence, for not only is it very far away, but even those who have seen it saw only

some parts of it and most of what they tell us is hearsay."[7] Out of all of this geographic diversity and sheer size one can, however, identify some definites and a few highly predictables. India does have three distinctive geographic regions which have definitely created economic, political and cultural regionalization. William Dunbar of the Center for Strategic and International Studies at Georgetown University recently concluded that "Typically, India's economy has been determined by the monsoon, its politics by tradition, and its foreign policies largely by security concerns vis-a-vis China and Pakistan."[8] The complete reliance of Indian agriculture on the whims of the annual monsoon is highly predictable. Unfortunately, however, the monsoons aren't all predictable and when they fail, crop failure is inevitable. Monsoons do mean seasonal movement of winds, a concentration of ninety percent of the annual precipitation in the four summer months and a mean annual temperature sufficient for crop production throughout the year. Slightly over one half of the area of India is arable and is currently under cultivation. Agriculture is very labor intensive and much of the field work is done by women and children.

Population

> "To those peoples in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required--not because the Communists may be doing it... but because it is right. If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich."
> (John F. Kennedy)

The population of India is estimated to be over 750,000,000 or one sixth of the world's human inhabitants. With such a huge population it is difficult to believe that only nine Indian cities and urban areas have populations exceeding one million. Over two thirds of the population is illiterate and

they live in more than 700,000 villages hopelessly tied to agriculture. The result is an agrarian social system that may be the most resistant to change the world has ever known.[9] In 1966 and 1967 the monsoons failed and the Bihar Famine took millions of lives. Since those dark days the "Green Revolution" has spread across India and today grain is being exported in limited quantities. Poverty is still pervasive and some forty percent of the population remains below the country's own modest definition of the poverty line of less than $100 U.S. per capita per year.[10] The Overseas Development Council and the International Food Policy Research Institute reports that "Recently these high estimates of the numbers of malnourished in Asia have been challenged. It has been suggested that, in the case of India, for example, the number of the seriously malnourished may be no more than 15-25 percent of the population if account is taken of various factors...."[11] This poverty and high concentrations of population in rural areas cause India to be essentially deeply conservative. Life expectancy at birth in India has risen from 43 years in 1960 to 52 years in 1981. During that same time period infant mortality has dropped from 165 per thousand to 121 per thousand. The Population Council estimates the Indian population is increasing slightly over two percent per year. The Indian population has more than doubled over the past 30 years and even the most conservative estimates predict it will double again in the next 40-50 years. In spite of having one of the best and most fully developed family planning programs in the developing world, India's population has continued to increase rapidly--due to a greater decline in the death rate than in the birth rate. The World Bank estimates the birth rate has declined by one third between the years 1960 and 1982. During that same time period, the World Bank estimates the death rate was reduced by more than one half. On the positive side the number of children to be born

to each family is presently nearly 5 and is predicted to decline by forty percent by the year 2000. India is fortunate indeed to be enjoying a current gross national product growth rate of over five percent.

It seems reasonable to conclude that India is one of the world's most variegated political and social entities. Additionally, it seems reasonable to conclude that the economy of the subcontinent is one of the world's most controversial and complex.

This limited overview of India, while not comprehensive, should, nevertheless be sufficient to apprise the uninitiated of the most salient issues.

Metamorphic India

A new India has appeared at center stage, but old India has never exited stage left. Foreign scholars in India are constantly reminded not to look for only one India but to study and come to know the many Indias which are now becoming one. In many ways India is a beautiful butterfly, in other ways, a sluggish moth and yet in another way an egg waiting to reveal its presently incubating inner life. "Inequities persist: There is endemic malnutrition and hunger alongside the food self-sufficiency and we are able to export cereals and other food products to the Soviet Union, statements of which the government is rightly proud; widespread illiteracy alongside a vast system of higher education; the centuries-old bull/ox cart and the Indian Satellite program; women forming patties of cow dung for cooking fuel and nuclear power plants; and an enormous disparity in income distribution that has narrowed little in thirty years."[12] Less than one third of the primary school age children were enrolled in school in 1947 when India gained its independence. By 1960, nearly sixty percent were enrolled and by 1985, it is estimated that

nearly 85 percent of the primary school age children are enrolled in school for part of the day and for at least part of the year. India has a rapidly growing middle class which is estimated to be from 75 to 100 million people. While this represents only ten to fifteen percent of the Indian population, the total number is greater than the entire population of any country in Europe and is by far the largest in the Third World.

In the final analysis, however, the future of India's basic development lies deeply rooted in the rural environment and the rural villages. "About 77 percent of the population of India lives in rural areas and agriculture forms the backbone of ...the rural economy."[13] Rajeev points out that "The rural economy of India cannot be salvaged merely by the development of agriculture.... But side by side with agricultural progress should proceed the development of village industries. Development of village industries are essential to absorb the surplus labor being displaced by the agricultural sector and ensure full employment in rural areas."[14] One of the major factors contributing to unemployment is the education system itself. Rural schools emphasize learning skills which are not useable in the rural environment. This leads to young people being unable to obtain meaningful employment in the rural environment. Indian youth often are forced to accept employment outside of their field of training. Therefore, India must make rapid progress in the development of not only primary employment opportunities in the rural sector but also secondary and teritory services and industries must be made available in village India. In spite of this current dilemma, the progress of India as a nation will depend largely upon the progress made in the field of education.

Education

Western style education was first introduced in the 19th century by the

British, and many Indians were trained for clerkships and minor civil service positions. An English style university system was introduced during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but the major thrust toward mass education came after Independance was gained in 1947. Enormous progress has been made in the past thirty-eight years. In 1970, twenty-four percent of the Indians were literate and by the early 1980's the estimates are over forty percent and increasing.

Increased numbers of young people going to school and college have occurred at all educational levels. The law requires all students to attend school until age fourteen. An estimated eighty-three percent of the 6-11 year-old group, 42 percent of the 11-14, and nearly a quarter of the 14-17 year olds are enrolled in primary, middle and secondary schools respectively in 1982-1983. Colleges and universities enroll about eight percent of the 17-25 year old population. Percentages of those completing the respective curricula are lower, especially in the critical lower grades.

In a real break with tradition, far more females are being educated than previously. Boys outnumber girls by two and three to one in the middle and secondary schools. Elitist selectivity in education dies hard in India as elsewhere.

Unsurprisingly, the education system remains amorphous. Too much teaching emulates the old priestly concern for rote memorization and the learning of facts for themselves. This may be partially attributed to a close imitation of the British system of private education which the British themselves are discarding in their modernizing process. Perhaps the greatest weakness in the educational system lies in the educational establishment's timidity in experimenting with innovative educational ideas and programs. Whatever the reasons, education in India is only partially supplying the kind of

educated people needed to reach the economic growth and full employment levels which the central government has set.

There are many indications that concerned people, including educators, are becoming aware of the need for a reordering of educational priorities. The teaching of manual skills and technical subjects are being introduced in Montessori and in Gandhian "basic" schools. These trends are being followed up in some vocational middle schools and technical colleges and universities.

Training which aims to dignify manual labor is still rare. India's educational system is still geared to educating people for white collar jobs in urban areas. But lack of industrialization of the economy makes her incapable of absorbing all her trained specialists. The unfortunate result has been a high degree of educational wastage, a flight of highly trained and educated Indian people to the more industrialized nations, and a disillusionment among the newly educated with the general lack of manpower planning. A rigorous overhauling of the educational system is necessary if the system is to meet the needs of industrialization. An unemployment rate of seven to ten percent among college and university graduates in a nation critically short of trained personnel mirrors India's educational dilemma.

Rural Education

> "India is a world in itself, it is too vast, too diverse for any complete description. It is in the midst of a great transformation. Indeed, even I who have lived here all my life, travelled many thousands of miles covering known places as well as those difficult of access, I who have met million upon million of our people cannot claim to have understood all, or even most of this extraordinary land.... What I can do... is merely point out certain outlines and examples that have helped to mold us as a people.
>
> No country can be judged by the standards of another. Until you discard all labels and preconditioning, India will

> not reveal herself. India is unlike anywhere else, perhaps not fully within comprehension, yet if you are relaxed and receptive in mind, it is capable of yielding many worthwhile experiences and stimulating ideas. Look beyond the poverty, the heat and the dust to the spirit of the people. What is it that has enabled them to endure when so many other civilizations have crumbled?"[15]

In the villages, traditional occupational castes, adherence to orthodox Hinduism, primitive modes of power and archaic ideas of health and hygiene persist. Since seventy to eighty percent of the Indians are villagers, over 700,000 villages exist; modern society presently affects only a fraction of the country's population.

The government is attempting to expand educational and health services for the rural areas. The acceptance of improved seed, commercial fertilizers, advanced implements and reorganized growing seasons give promise of a thorough-going transformation of village life in the future. Sugar, dairy and other agricultural cooperatives probably offer the greatest hope for an improved rural educational system and healthy village environment. Nevertheless, dissatisfaction with the quality of village life, especially among the newly educated, has led many Indians to abandon their villages for life in the cities. The entire situation facing rural education leads one to speculate if John Kenneth Galbraith was right when he said that government debates in New Delhi are "inconsequential as well as inaudible to the 'real India' of the rural masses."[16] Perhaps India has too many intellectuals and too few technicians and intelligent scientists, industrialists, business and political leaders.

One has to make a distinction between an intellectual and an intelligent person. A person who makes great scientific discoveries is an intelligent person, but he may not be an intellectual. An intellectual is an intelligent person who is actively interested in human and social issues and enthusiastically

participates in discussions relating to human problems and human progress. Many of our greatest scientists whose contribution and involvement was entirely in the field of scientific research cannot be considered to be intellectuals. Such intelligent scientists as Einstein, in the past, and Sakharov today, however, must be classified as intellectuals. They have taken great interest in the problems of mankind.

Many Indian intellectuals have had a Marxist orientation and the Indian soil is not suitable for the growth of Marxian ideas. To be successful, the intellectual must have his roots in the soil and propagate ideas that will germinate and bring forth fruit suited to the unique Indian conditions. India has been producing intellectuals and has been victimized by an enormous "brain drain." In rural Indian today, the basic purpose of school education is to make the population functionally literate. Because of the emphasis which has been placed upon education as an intellectual exercise, India has lagged behind the developed world in vocational and practical education. Indian parents are not able to perceive any utility in education and therefore, often do not encourage their children to continue in school. An additional problem with rural education is that schools are placed at too great a distance from each other. Parents are reluctant to send their small children, especially the females, very far from their homes. Because distance is a definite factor in the drop-out rate of primary school children, schools must be built closer together. In a recent interview with American Fulbright professors, Rajiv Gandhi stressed the importance he places upon education, especially education for rural areas, tribal peoples (formerly untouchables) and women. Vocational education is also placed high on the new Prime Minister's priority list. A leading Indian geographer and international educator has summarized the situation as follows: "In the future a great deal of importance has to be

given to the development of university education. The pace of progress and modernization of our country will largely depend on the extent of progress we make in the field of higher education. The future image of India and Indians and our contribution to human progress will largely be based on our achievements in the field of higher education and reserach."[17]

Conclusion

As a result of the rural dilemma, not entirely unlike the one America faced after World War I, urbanization is growing faster than India is able to industrialize. The consequences are apparent everywhere and growing almost daily. Rajiv Gandhi is doubtlessly singing the old Judy Garland song "How you going to keep them down on the farms after they've seen (Par-ee), Bombay and Calcutta." Overcrowding, inadequate housing, poor sanitation facilities, unemployment, and perhaps worse of all, a loss of personal identity and social position due to the lack of caste identity in urban areas compounds India's problems. Once the caste identity is lost, the Indian often feels that he/she doesn't have any proper place or personal identity.

The government has made a significant effort to ameliorate these conditions through large scale building programs and the creation of critical industries in rural as well as urban areas. In addition, new industries, such as tourism are being encouraged as a source of foreign currency.

India is mainland Asia's greatest adherent of democratic government. Although faced with awesome problems, India remains steadfast on the course, albeit a much slower path, of democracy rather than embracing the supposedly quicker means of totalitarianism. Her success will depend upon the willingness of her leaders, from Rajiv Gandhi down to the 700,000 plus village leaders, to face the magnitude of her difficulties and to carry out a thorough reformation of her basic institutions.

The centrifugal forces of linguistic diversity, religious and political communalism, and the maintenance of informal caste divisions in the villages combined with the slow pace of economic development will continue to plague India. Religious Communalism and a sense of national identity compete with the national state for the loyalty of the citizens. Linguistic diversity in the form of sixteen major languages and hundreds of dialects reinforce these fissiparous tendencies. The problem of having school books and tests in so many languages is an enormous problem, but it has almost been accomplished. A knowledge of Hini, (India's national language), the regional language, the local dialect and English are often necessary for normal communication in rural districts and urban areas.

The synergistic effect of these problems has led many Indians to seek alternate models of modernization. The growth of Communism in Kerela in the south (the Soviet Model) and the Nauxilites (Maoist or Mainland China adherants) in the Calcutta area reflect a movement by some intellectuals to force more rapid change. Rajiv Gandhi and the Congress Party, if it is to forestall the growth of these movements, must make the social and economic revolutions promised in the constitution a reality. "The limits of India's potential growth are presently not in sight because not only have priorities never been granted to production, but one could expect a significant increase in production to have an important social and political impact on population growth where persuasion and technological gimmickry have failed."[18] Indians, unlike the popular caricature, are highly dynamic and nationalistic and the combination could be highly productive. In nearly everyone's opinion, the population problem must be brought under control or the best efforts possible will only result in maintaining the status quo. Perhaps the green revolution in the rural environment when combined with the substantial oil deposits recently discovered will provide the lubricant and energy so desperately

needed by the Indian economic and political machine. One senses that Gulliver has awakened, perceived his situation, tested the bonds, but has yet to decide to exert his considerable strength and to free himself from the shackles of poverty and human suffering. The Prime Minister's promise to greatly increase the availability and quality of rural education and educational opportunities for the tribals, the untouchables, and for the Indian female should produce a new India. Modern India has the potential to far surpass the wonder that was ancient India. With the education of the rural masses, the human surplus could become the nation's greatest resource, all seven hundred and fifty million of them.

Footnotes

[1] M.P. Rege, "The Nature of Hindu Beliefs and Values," in Seminar in Indian Studies, ed. V.M. Sirsikar and R. Wayne Jones (Poona: The University of Poona, 1973), p. 55.

[2] Fergueson College, personal interview, Summer, 1985.

[3] William Dunbar, India in Transition (Beverly Hills, California: Saga Publications, 1976), p. 7.

[4] Fergueson College, personal interview, Summer, 1985.

[5] D.M. Wagh, "Geography and Population of India," in Seminar in Indian Studies, ed. V.M. Sirsikar and R. Wayne Jones (Poona: The University of Poona, 1973), p. 20.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Dunbar, India in..., p. 7.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Catherine Gwin and Lawrence A. Veit, "The Indian Miracle," Unpublished paper, The University of Poona, n.d.

[11] Barbara Huddleston, "Confronting World Hunger," C.A.R.E. Office of Education. CARE BRIEFS, #3 (New York: C.A.R.E. World Headquarters, n.d.), p. 3.

[12] Gwin and Veit, "The Indian..."

[13] P.V. Rajeev, India, a Nation in Transition (New Delhi, India: Asian Publication Services, 1985), p. 41.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Indira Gandhi, Eternal India (Bombay: B.I. Publications,1980).

[16] Dunbar, India in..., p. 93.

[17] Rajeev, India, a ..., p. 80.

[18] Dunbar, India in..., p. 77.

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